

COWLING (R.O)

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AN ADDRESS

UPON THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

LUNSFORD PITTS YANDELL, M.D.

Late President Elect of the Kentucky State Medical Society.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE KENTUCKY STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY, AT THE MEETING
HELD IN FRANKFORT, APRIL, 1878.

By RICHARD O. COWLING, A. M., M. D.

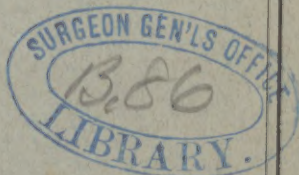
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MEDICUS



LUNSFORD PITTS YANDELL, M. D

AN ADDRESS UPON THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE LATE PRESIDENT ELECT OF THE KENTUCKY STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY.

BY RICHARD O. COWLING, A.M., M.D.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Kentucky State Medical Society:

The circumstances of our meeting one year ago in Louisville must be fresh in the minds of many now present. The success which attended that session has ever since been a matter of congratulation to the friends of the organization. In fullness of numbers it had not been surpassed, nor ever before had there been more individual effort to render the work of the Society worthy of its station and its name. I am sure, too, that few could have gone to their homes without the most pleasant recollections of the kindly greetings which had been interchanged by representatives of our profession from nearly every portion of our state. You will remember, also, that nature herself lent assistance to the success of our meeting, and smiled upon us with the balmiest days of her earliest spring.

Looking back to those pleasant hours to-night, I know that even if the commemorative occasion did not bring it up, prominently before our minds must rise the circumstances which attended the election of the President who, sadly, was never to take his seat.

The applause which rang out from that full assemblage when his name was presented, told how universally and how heartily he had been chosen. Friends formed in a generation gone by, whose admiration and respect had grown deeper with frosting heads, joined in the stormy approval along with the youthful members who but yesterday

were admitted to our ranks. And when the old warrior came forward and so gracefully acknowledged the compliment which had been paid him, I am quite certain that if there were those present who had wished for other things, "even the ranks of Tuscany did not forbear a cheer."

Alas, that our work had been so long deferred! Not that he needed it to fill up the measure of his fame, though I know he lovingly prized it, but that our association should have missed the honor of his presidency. Alas, that to-night, instead of his graceful words of cheer and his wise counsels for our welfare, we should meet to mourn his loss and to listen to this feeble record of his virtues and his worth.

I shall not attempt any detailed account of the life of Lunsford Pitts Yandell. Several are already in print; one by the venerable Professor Theodore Bell, his friend and pupil, in a masterly eulogium, delivered at the late commencement of the University of Louisville; another singularly succinct and exact by Dr. Toner, in the Nashville Journal of Medicine, and sketches in various other medical journals of the country. Besides these, he had, with his own modest and graceful pen, furnished for Dr. Lindsey the data for his biography, which will appear in the Medical Annals of Tennessee.

He was the son of Wilson Yandell, a doctor of high repute, and of Elizabeth Pitts, whose virtues he ever bore in most affectionate remembrance. He was born near Hartsville, Tenn., July 4, 1805. He was taught at first by his mother, then at a neighboring school, and later at an academy in Murfreesboro.

He commenced the study of medicine with his father when he was seventeen years old. At eighteen he went to Lexington, Ky., to attend his first course of lectures in the Transylvania University. His second course was taken in Baltimore, in the University of Maryland, where he graduated in 1825. He practiced for awhile in his native state, and in 1831 he was elected professor of chemistry in the Transylvania University, at Lexington, Ky., succeeding Dr. Blythe. He removed to Louisville in 1837, and assisted in the foundation of the University of Louisville. He remained in that institution for twenty years, filling, at various times, the chairs of chemistry, pathology, and physiology. In 1857 he went to Memphis, and for a short period was professor of practice in a school then in existence there, but which closed at the

breaking out of the war. He was admitted to the Presbyterian ministry in 1862, and was for awhile pastor of a congregation at Danceyville, Tenn. He returned to Louisville at the close of the war, when he resumed the practice of his profession. He died of pneumonia, at the house of his son, Dr. L. P. Yandell, jr., February 4, 1878.

Such is the brief outline of his career. To fill the scanty frame with the likeness it contained—to portray the lineaments of the character and delineate the features of the mind and will which made up one of the most extraordinary men which our profession in this state has produced—is my present task. Nor is it a simple task. There are many before me who can judge how nearly the representation agrees with the original. To those, perhaps, what I might say of our lost leader signifies but little, so deeply has he stamped his own image upon their minds. A wrong color might offend but can not deceive; yet, haply, because the record I bear is an official record, directed by this, the highest body of the profession in the state, in it may some time be sought an estimate of Dr. Yandell when other actors occupy the scene. This would demand that care be taken that no improper estimate was left by one who professed to know him. But it is of even greater importance that what I know would have been his wishes, upon such an occasion as this, should be respected. More than all, men would be offended if the truth and the whole truth were not told to the best of my ability.

I can not recall the time when I did not know Dr. Yandell; but it was only upon my entrance into the profession that I had opportunity of judging his character. When I was a boy, he impressed me as being a severe man, and I think that this was generally the first impression he made upon those who met him or those who saw him but little. His habits of work and study, the gravity of his appearance, nay, even the exactness of his politeness, concealed from the stranger his exceedingly social nature. He formed few special intimacies with the members of his profession, but he bore most friendly feelings toward them, and no man prized more highly its return. His features would always light up at the recountal of a kindly speech that had been made of him, and a hearty acknowledgment would always follow. He mixed a great deal with the doctors of Louisville, but chiefly in the several societies. His manner there to old and young

was exceedingly kind. At the meeting of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, called to take action upon his death, Dr. Turner Anderson, in his remarks, dwelt forcibly upon the courtesy and fairness which had always characterized Dr. Yandell in his debates before that body. He was, in fact, not a demonstrative man to the world in general. Great dignity was the chief characteristic of his manner, but upon occasions he showed the deepest feeling. In his devotion to his family he took not a single thought of himself. Seldom was there such a father, and in the society of the little ones of his children's households the pleasure of his existence seemed to culminate. I refer to this trait which is common with many men, for it was more than naturally prominent in Dr. Yandell. It is difficult to recall him in his later years separated from his grandchildren. He scarcely ever appeared in public without them. They, with their little friends, filled his carriage to the brim when he rode; they flocked around him as he walked; they chattered about him as he sat at his work. The last three years of his life were almost incessantly occupied by him in writing the Medical Annals of Kentucky, and these little people accompanied him from the beginning to the end of his work.

There were others, too, to whom he showed feeling. He warmed toward men in books. He spoke enthusiastically of his favorite authors in general literature, as in his profession, and of many of the men whom he had met in controversy, he bore the frankest testimony of their worth. He had a chivalrous devotion to womanhood. I doubt if ever in his long life he dropped a disrespectful word toward one of the gentler sex. He was twice married to women of singular goodness, and of the love he bore his companions, and the influence they had upon his life, he records the most grateful testimony. He delighted in female society, and women were instinctively drawn toward their knightly devotee. The kindness of his heart showed itself in many ways. His services and his purse were freely drawn upon by the poor. He was markedly polite to his inferiors. Some one laughingly told me his consideration for servants was tiresome. Rather than rouse his hostler and his horse, he made his night visits on foot on one occasion when his patient lived three miles away, and he then a man nearly seventy.

I have dwelt upon the social nature of Dr. Yandell's disposition,

for I know that to many it was not fully known. There were other traits in his character, and events in his history that stood out so prominently as to obscure somewhat his kindly side to the knowledge of the world at large. He was a thoroughly determined man, and his energy was equal to his will. Moreover, he was absolutely brave. He never shirked a duty for the fear of unpleasant consequences, and the result was that from first to last he had many controversies. He was a professor in the Transylvania School of Medicine when it was in the heyday of its fortune. In spite of this, he believed that its empire must fail, and a school in Louisville supersede it. When he had made up his mind to this he speedily acted upon his belief, gave up his chair at Lexington, and went to Louisville to assist in the foundation of the University there. The severance of the old ties and the birth of the rival institution of course provoked an angry discussion, and in it he took his part. The growth of the University of Louisville to its unexpected proportions and the changes necessary, or thought to be necessary, to its welfare, brought on many others, in which he was champion of a side. Nay, more, when he had apparently long retired from the arena, and was wholly disconnected with the schools and their animosities, when other men took it upon themselves to open the record and wage the old war, again he was there as of old to do battle. And I am obliged to record, too, that I believe he was glad to be there. He was never a quarreler; but I think when the glove was thrown to him, he picked it up with feelings akin to enthusiasm. I witnessed one of his encounters, and I do not think I ever saw so skillful and so severe a debater as he then showed himself to be.

But he never harped on these things; never disputed for the sake of dispute. Satire he laughed at sometimes, but never attempted in the slightest. When he wrote or spoke against any one he shot right at the mark. When unprovoked, sentiment was his natural vein. Some one was laughing to him about the gushing speeches which had been made in one of the meetings of the American Association, but he said he delighted to see it; that good feeling was to be valued far above words. And this meant a great deal from him, for he was the most scholarly man the profession in Kentucky has produced.

Dr. Yandell was in his seventy-third year when he died. Few

would have detected from his appearance and his habits that his age was so great. His carriage was erect, save the inclination of his head, which was bowed in thought; his step was firm and elastic, and he walked with a swinging stride. I have already related his powers as a pedestrian upon one occasion. He showed even others more remarkable. A few years ago only, while on a botanizing tour, he was attracted by a piece of mistletoe, which his young companion declining to get, he climbed a considerable distance to secure. Only last fall he spent a day in the fields shooting, enduring the fatigue without difficulty, and securing his share of the game. His physical endurance was rather strange, too, as his health—while rarely seriously interfered with until his fatal illness—was never robust. But it was rather the youthfulness of his disposition in many things, and not of his physique, that I wished to record. He did not expect the ordinary aids which the young naturally render to the old. In fact, they rather annoyed him. Not that he ever gave the painful exhibition of the would-be young man, but that he expressed his natural feelings. He liked young men, and invited their society, and entered into their feelings. He had great faith, too, in youth. At one time it was sneeringly said that the University was in the hands of boys. He publicly declared that the boys were in many respects better than the men of his day. When Prof. Holland was elected to the chair of chemistry in the University, the one which Dr. Yandell had in former times occupied, he was a graduate of but one year's standing. It was human nature to think that his old work could not be successfully carried on by one so deficient in years, but it was Dr. Yandell himself who urged upon him to accept the chair, and for a whole month he faithfully attended his lectures, sitting with the students upon the benches, giving him what criticism he thought necessary, encouraging him by his praise both to himself and others. Dr. Holland spoke of this incident in his remarks before the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Louisville.

The religious phases of Dr. Yandell's character have been described so elaborately and so well by Prof. Bell that I need not dwell upon them here. His first public utterance as a teacher in Lexington was in defense of Christianity. His life thenceforward was consistently in that path, and in 1862 he entered the ministry of the Presbyterian

Church. Long before that he had delivered many public lectures in Louisville upon the supports which science gave to religion, and the analysis of the latter-day philosophy failed to shake him in his ancient belief. He conversed much upon the subject in late years, and in the form of reviews wrote one or more papers upon it.

To Prof. Bell I must also leave the estimate of Dr. Yandell as a naturalist.

And I reach at last his direct relations with the profession of medicine. In these we view him as a practitioner, a teacher, and a writer, and in an ascending scale. Least of all was he a practitioner of medicine; circumstances early led to this. He records himself his boyish taste for natural science. A copy of Goldsmith's *Animated Nature* opened to him, he says, a world of delight. Chemistry was his first love, dampened somewhat by imperfect presentation in Transylvania, but rekindled under the fiery words of De Butts at Baltimore, upon whose powers he dwelt with delight in his autobiographical sketches.

He practiced awhile upon his return from college in Tennessee, but the position in Transylvania was early offered him. Chemistry he taught for six years in Lexington, and chemistry was the chair he accepted in Louisville. He added to it later, in the exigency of the school, that of pathology, teaching both branches, and still later was transferred to physiology. The chair of *materia medica* was offered him long before this, but he declined it, that Mitchell might come into the school. He afterward regretted that he had been obliged to do this. He believed that it would have been better for him to have been weaned from his predilections toward a less practical branch, and forced to give himself up to one which bore directly upon the everyday duties of his profession. Perhaps other causes combined to draw him away from clinical study and cultivation of practice at a time when it was most important for him to do so. He was devoted to natural science, and he did not see, or at any rate did not care if he did see, that it was drawing him away from the path of a doctor. The income from the school in those days was very large, and there was no necessity for his making exertion outside to increase his means. Be all this as it may, I think I am right in saying that, comparatively speaking, the relations he bore the profession as a practitioner were

vastly inferior to those he bore as a writer or teacher. He had a fair practice. He was no mean surgeon, too; had cut for stone, and performed capital operations several times when he had been forced to do so; but practice was not nearest to his heart. He was much like John Hunter in this respect—a call interrupted him in his work. It was the science of medicine that he loved, rather than the art. His predilections were toward obstetrics. He was an early and persistent advocate of chloroform in labor. He was about the earliest practitioner in the state to recognize the value of potassic bromide. Sydenham was his ideal among medical philosophers, and his visiting list was adorned with quotations from him. "*Natura sanat, ars curat*," and "*Primum est non nocere*," were transcribed in his later books. Nevertheless he sometimes seemed to lend powerful aid to nature, and apparently ran some risks. He ordinarily gave drachm doses of muriate tincture of iron, and half-ounce doses of ergot.

As a teacher he was in his element. On the rostrum his enthusiasm came out. I never heard him lecture at the school, but I judge of the enthusiasm with which he entered upon his work by his conduct at the societies. He was the life of these; the best of speakers and the best of listeners. It pleased him to see the work go on. If other men were disposed to take the floor, he waited; but did they flag, he was always ready and always interesting. I have seen him, too, called up at unexpected times to address people on subjects other than medical, and never saw him make a failure. His career as a teacher of medicine extended over a period of nearly thirty years, and during this time he was connected in the Transylvania School and University of Louisville with many of the most distinguished men the country has produced, and the testimony of those who heard him was that he was among the best. Still, high as was his rank as a lecturer, he had even greater powers as a schoolman. He was a wonderful organizer. I do not wish to claim for him the credit of the foundation of the University of Louisville over his colleagues, but certain it is that but for his enthusiasm, his faith, his industry, his influence over the men who were to join the classes, the enterprise would not have had its speedy success, and if it grew to such proportions as it did by the wisdom of its managers, he was notoriously among the most influential of them. He built for himself a great monument in these schools. Its broad

foundation is laid in the hearts of thousands of practitioners in the West and South, and I am constantly reminded, by expressions of esteem I hear from many a one of them whose head is now grown gray, how lasting was the material with which he built.

But high as was Prof. Yandell's as a schoolman, I think that his chief fame will rest upon his character as a writer. No one in the southern ranks of medicine has surpassed him in his industry as an author or in the quality of his work. At his death he was the oldest medical journalist in America save Hays. He commenced in 1832 with the *Transylvania Journal*, upon which he continued until he removed to Louisville. He founded the *Western Journal of Medicine*, which lived till 1857. He was actively employed upon the *American Practitioner*, and wrote a number of articles for the *Louisville Medical News*. I saw in a list prepared by himself in 1874 the titles of one hundred and seventy articles, which he had written to that date, but I imagine the untitled work he had accomplished was ten times that, and at no period of his life was his pen so busy as in the last three years. He was a writer of classical purity. Indeed, Professor Yandell was early grounded in classical learning, and never gave up his study in this direction, nor his admiration therefor. He was thoroughly cultured, too, in belles lettres, delighted in poetry (I think he knew every line of Tennyson's *Idyls* by heart), and the models of his taste were of the best. He was singularly clear in his expressions. No one could find him tripping in his grammar or involved in his sentences. He wrote on almost every subject in medicine. His forte, however, was in medical biography. The *Medical Annals of Kentucky*, still in manuscript, is a marvel of excellence and industry, containing not only sketches of the lives of Kentucky doctors, but critical notices of their works from the days of Boone to the present. He was, too, the readiest of writers. He worked along, wholly undisturbed, sitting in the front office of his son's house, where people were constantly coming and going, and as I have before said, with the grandchildren literally hanging on to him. I have had many occasions personally to note this facility. He was one of the very few men I ever saw who could be depended on at any moment to furnish copy for a journal. The last paper he ever wrote was upon the "Diseases and Hygiene of Old Age," the proofs of which he attempted to correct upon his death-bed.

Those of you who read it in the Practitioner for February will agree with me, I am sure, in pronouncing it one of the most interesting of the many papers he had written. Alas! that he should have neglected one of the precautions upon which he had laid so much stress, and become a victim of the disease which he had recorded as so fatal to the old. He met his fate manfully, of course. There was just one regret, that he could not live to finish the work in which he had been so wrapped up—the Medical Annals of Kentucky; a heart-pang for the loved ones he left; and I believe a passing thought that we should meet here to-night and he not be present; and then he gave up concern for this world and waited without fear for the dawn of the next.

God grant that from that last sleep into which he fell he wakes to the glorious resurrection in which he so firmly believed.

